

Mr. Holliday Is Deified

By BENJAMIN DE CASSERES.

WHEN you went down or up Broadway in one of the old cable cars, and you were compelled to stand, do you remember the conductor's slogan as you approached Fourteenth street?

"Hold fast goin' 'round the curve!" he shouted through the car.

It's just like that when I pick up a new book of Robert Cortes Holliday's. The book is a car packed full of curious people and each chapter is a curve. If you stand right inside the chapters you get wonderfully diverse views through the shining windows, and if you stand on the platform of the book, where "Bob" himself is the conductor, you can look at the world as it rapidly disappears in the distance.

Holliday's cable car not only runs up and down the Broadway of life, but dodges in and out of many curious, little known streets. In fact, there is no Battery or Harlem car barn in the ride at all. The whole pleasure of the intellectual trip consists in going nowhere in particular. You dash from Broome street into Fifth avenue, strike into Forty-second street, whirl down along the waterfront; suddenly finding yourself going over Brooklyn or London Bridge. While your eye is thus guzzling in the sights Conductor Bob is pouring anecdotes of all these streets into your ears, the people that lived in them, the queer boarding houses that have harbored Robert; with intermezzi on art, china, dogs, fireplugs, Chesterton, love, Jim Humecker, the war and the bartenders that are no more.

When I reviewed his *Walking Stick Papers* last year I said that Robert Cortes Holliday was "the O. Henry of the essay." His latest book, *Broome Street Straws*, is a good successor to that book. It is packed from cover to cover with palatable edibles. It is a feast prepared by a bohemian spirit—the bohemian spirit that doesn't depend on wine to keep it bouncing. Holliday is an enemy to the Eighteenth Amendment, like all wise spirits. But that chunk of "bent light" in the Constitution has not in the least destroyed the focus of the rays that come from that riant mind.

He is a rollicking, Rabelaisian American who has something of the touch of Anatole France, the graciousness of Charles Lamb, the keen and subtle satire of Mark Twain and that gift of auto-irony that is apparent nowhere in the literature of America to-day except it be in the pages of James Humecker and Don Marquis.

When you read him you feel from the get-away of the first sentence that you are not talking to a writer, but to a man, the eternal Man that you meet in a bar-room, a theatrical lobby, a ball game, an art show, a printer's alley or in Chinatown. Everything he says is an "aside," a parenthetical remark, one of those little bits of conversation you catch over the wire nowadays while the lines are crossed and while you are waiting for the operator to give you the wrong number. No pedantry here; no "Art for art's sake," or ink for ink's sake, but downright life—broad smiles that go to the marrow of the thing, by a man who says, "There is nothing profound except humor!"

Broome Street Straws is a great pick-me-up after you've spent the night with, say, Paul Elmer More. You'll sit and read it all morning and let your job slide. It is the fascination of an unexpected conversation with Pickwick or Tristram Shandy.

Broome street is the overtone to this symphony of humor and criticism. I confess that after reading it I immediately jumped a car and walked from one end of that street to the other. I could

not see what Mr. Holliday saw because my senses lack the absorptive principle in their makeup.

On *Eating Dinner* is Chapter II. Not much of a theme, but what's a theme? Here is a piece of "hilarious babble" in Keene's Chop House when, although Thous were virtuous, there was ale. It is all more vivid than the place itself. It is written with all the senses at once. It is a literary and gustatorial mess served by a chef who knows the "boys."

For sheer literary whimsicality turn to Chapter IV., *An Article Without an Idea*. This is in praise of verbal rambling. The style's the thing. Lag in an idea if you want to, but for heaven's sake put it in a beautiful Easter egg. An egg's an egg, but the manner of eating it betrays the man. The best of literature is gossip. Look at Montaigne and Boswell and the other immortal leap frogs.

An *Amorous Conspiracy* is a story that O. Henry might have written (although turning to Chapter X. we find Mr. Holliday discoursing on *The Amazing Failure of O. Henry*). One Murphy, an illiterate student of the bass drum, conceives the Rostandese-Cyrano-Christian idea of getting three or four people, including a pen flourishing bartender, to write his love letters. An old theme turned by the author into something exquisitely human and humorous, with an "unexpected ending." "See, I can do it, too!" says Holliday, who when he has finished hops over to Henry James or Omar Khayyam.

Well, we could ramble on forever about the freshness, hilarity, humor, acuteness and beautiful style of *Broome Street Straws*, for I never review a book of Holliday's that I do not catch his manner. He is a veritable glutton before the banquet of everyday life and his pores sweat the relish of it.

BROOME STREET STRAWS. By ROBERT CORTES HOLLIDAY. George H. Doran Company.

La Fayette Can Stand It

WITH books, as with people, handsome is as handsome does. With *La Fayette in America*, by Octavia Roberts, is a slightly volume—but it doesn't. The letterpress is beautiful and the illustrations, which are reproductions from old woodcuts and engravings, are most interesting. But the narrative itself, describing La Fayette's two visits to America at 20 and at 67, is horribly sentimental, while the historical present as the author uses it only aggravates this complaint. "A snag it proves to be that has so rudely broken the voyage"; or "Now the Ohio receives him on her breast."

The passages from the letters the author has selected for quotation are chiefly the more sentimental passages from the letters written to his wife. "Let us imagine ourselves behind the chair of Adrienne La Fayette, the joyful, trembling Marquise" as she reads her letters from America.

"There is one that must have made the bright eyes of the little Marquise shine with joy, that must have been read and reread threadbare to her parents, to her sisters, perhaps playfully to the baby Anastasia."

"Perhaps playfully to the baby Anastasia." It will be seen that with what may be a commendable fear of departing from strict history and known facts the author rarely makes a direct and positive statement, but resorts to "perhaps" and "doubtless," "more than likely" and "must have been."

"Doubtless the good Baron's response was more brief." "Doubtless he laughed with Madison." "It is more than likely that his kind host spoke French." "I think he must have paused in the old market place." "Monticello must have been a charming place to visit." "The gratification which La Fayette must have felt." "In his chivalry he must have gone out of his way to treat Mrs. Jackson kindly."

The effect of this kind of writing is to make the reader doubtful, to say the least.

N. P. D.
WITH LAFAYETTE IN AMERICA. By OCTAVIA ROBERTS. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company.

SAX ROHMER rises to remark that his story *Dope* is not based on the Billee Carlton case, as its publishers, Robert M. McBride & Co., had announced—and as unquestionably appeared. Mr. Rohmer is open to the inference that the case was based upon *Dope*, for he says he had been at work on the story some weeks when Miss Carlton died.

As Ever, Mrs. Humphry Ward

MRS. WARD'S *Helena* is the incessantly New Woman from the newest of angles. Poured molten in her unforged girlhood into the fiery vat of war, she emerges a type so different in her attitude toward society, so startlingly unaccountable in her possibilities for the future that she might be the creature of a stranger planet.

What the intrenched world will do to her, what she will do to the intrenched world, would be worth living more than mortal span to see.

What Mrs. Ward does to her is both interesting and revealing. Mrs. Ward has always been fearless in confronting Woman Rampant. A quiet acceptance of the absolutely inevitable is no slight weapon in the fight against change. With Mrs. Ward it deceives us by an appearance of sympathetic understanding. She paints her heroine well. Beautiful, impulsive, headstrong Helena, all the forces in her matured by the unchecked freedom, the stimulating, developing work of the war, is reined in sharply at its end, when she is placed under the guardianship of Lord Buntingford, twice her age but handsome, of an engaging melancholy and as strongwilled as he is. He spends all his time and thought upon this perplexing, enchanting ward of his.

But she is not thrilled by the attention. "That is the way women have always been taken in," she said stubbornly. "Men fling them scraps to keep them quiet. But as to the real feast—liberty to discover the world for themselves, make their own experiments—no, thank you!" And again: "But I won't take anybody's else moral sense for judge. We've got to overhaul that sort of thing from top to bottom."

It is the clash of two generations, two views of life, the eternal clash, in a more virulent form than ever before. "The unrest in her was the same unrest that was driving men everywhere—and women, too—into industrial disturbance and moral revolt. The old is done with; and the Tree of Life needs to be well shaken before the new fruit will drop." What shall be done with these women "who have no use any longer for the reticence of the past, who desire to know all they possibly can about themselves, their own thoughts and sensations, their own peculiarities and powers"?

Mrs. Ward knows perfectly well what she will do. It is really quite stupefying, her calm, impervious assurance in the face of this staggering problem. She will not yield to this young, mad, new world. She will deny that it has a new psychology and must have new solutions for its old problems, which vary so little fundamentally in character, no matter how far they change their outer forms.

The beginning excites and tantalizes. This is new and heady wine! How drunk a Russian could become on it! What ruddy, ill-considered libations he would pour upon the ground! But no. Out come the old, old bottles. And in goes the wine from a steady hand. Helena falls in love with Lord Buntingford, not knowing what is the matter with her (oh, the delicious, maidenly romance of that atavistic touch), while several engaging youths are in love with her. But there is a Mystery beneath the proud lord's demeanor. It takes shape along creakily familiar lines. Helena falls out of love very properly and marries her most eligible and interesting suitor.

"Marry, my dear child—and bring up children," said Lord Buntingford bluntly. "That's the chief duty of Englishwomen just now."

It is the ancient answer. "Love and a child's clinging mouth and the sweetness of a Darby and Joan old age for these all, but the perverted women had always lived and would always live."

It is an easy answer for an author with

a young, superlatively beautiful heroine on her hands. But there are other women. There must be other answers. And somehow there is an uneasy sense that Helena is still filled with fermenting questions.

M. P. A.

HELENA. By MRS. HUMPHRY WARD. Dodd, Mead & Co.

Love Letters Better Lost

UNDER the title of *The Professor's Love-Life*, the story of Ronsby Maldelewith serves as an example of the perils of letter publishing. The preface credits the letters with lyricism and all that one looks for in love letters, but both title and preface are misleading. The "professor" is a man of 26 with a job in a newspaper office, and the lyricism is warped with a strain of perhaps neuralgia. The cough, however, develops into consumption and it is evident that the documentary tragedy should have been left to its own dignity and not served up smartly as a Christmas present for maiden ladies. This is a book for which the author is not to blame. If he had lived he might have wondered that his "Katherine" had married him (as she would have done) after such letters. He is such a very grave young man. "Unutterable poverty," he writes, "I fear will ever be the lot of the millions, dishonest gains and arrogance the preeminence of the few. Still there are Homer and Plato, Beethoven and Shakespeare, and Goethe, others too many to name, and all nature, and you." Oh, we've all written them just like it! But most of us have been saved by the kindly oblivion of the waste basket.

J. C. M.

THE PROFESSOR'S LOVE-LIFE. By RONSBY MALDELEWITH. The Macmillan Company.

Happy Family Papers

THE art of the essay, gently discursive and urbanely humorous, offers itself with no small degree of excellence in Frances Lester Warner's collection entitled *Endicott and I*. These essays ramble delightfully along much as one might expect a fireside conversation to go if the principal raconteur were nimble witted and fully capable of catching the pleasant, homely glamour that enhances the commonplaces of existence. Miss Warner describes the pleasures of the home circle orchestra, the whole family getting together for a night of music; the comical possibilities of sketching various scenes without trying to exert any genuine draughtsman's ability; the difficulties and virtues of conducting family prayers in an age when such ancient practices are steadily diminishing in visible importance; the humorous attempts to hold the floor in conversation; the important problem of "reducing;" chess; the joys of fishing, and half a dozen other interests and customs of the family that finds its chief enjoyment in its own company.

ENDICOTT AND I. By FRANCES LESTER WARNER. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

"THE printers on a big newspaper never know what it is to hunger for reading matter," confides the Century Company, going on to tell how a "story" made up of selections from *White Shadows in the South Seas* so absorbed the man who was setting it as to cause him to miss his lunch. We don't know, though, about the general affirmation. Not all copy is as hunger satisfying as excerpts from Frederick O'Brien's writings—or as a few dozen underdone paragraphs like this one.

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